



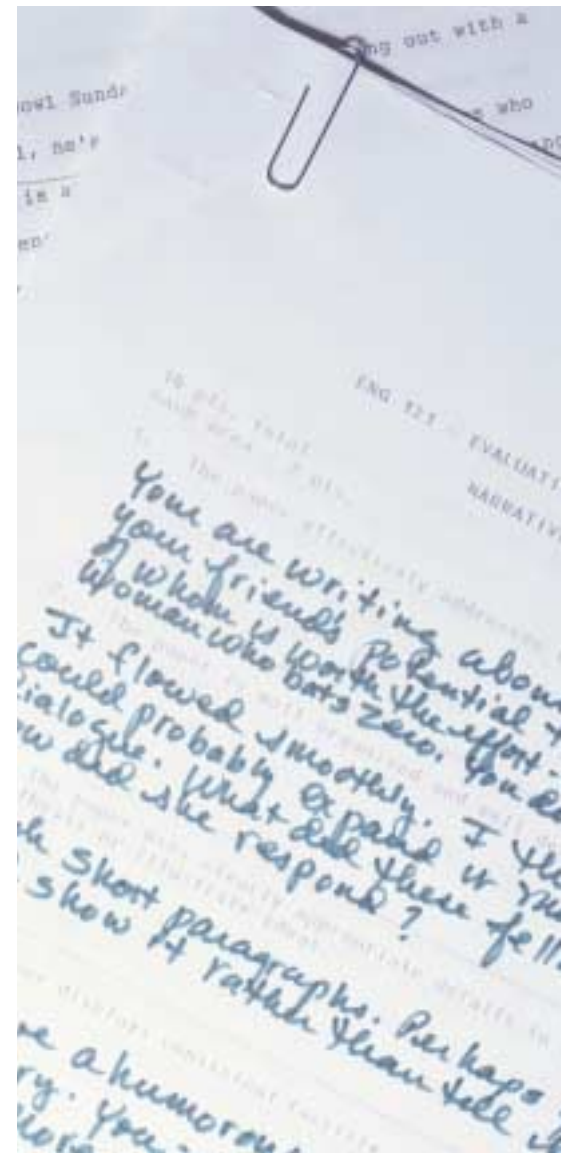
## Chapter 3

# Portfolios

The New Jersey Department of Education defines portfolios as collections of samples of students' work that show progress and achievements in one or more areas over a period of time. Samples for the portfolio may be chosen by the student alone or by the student and the teacher together. Typically, the student includes a written reflection for each sample that explains why the sample was selected. Portfolios may be cumulative and follow the student from grade to grade. Portfolio assessment tools may include among other things collections of student work samples, work folders, and assessment folders.

Portfolios provide a documented, cumulative record of student achievement. Portfolios are particularly useful in demonstrating career-planning and workplace readiness skills. They also provide a strategy for assessing the student's critical-thinking, decision-making, problem-solving and self-management skills. Portfolios can enhance the learning process by offering students the opportunity to evaluate their own work and to create a "collection of work" that best represents the student's growth and development over time. This chapter provides information on the purpose, structure, assessment, and reliability of career-development and project-specific portfolios and explains how teachers and counselors can use portfolios as a tool in the implementation of Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards.

Traditional paper-and-pencil tests or selected-response tests that contain multiple-choice, matching, or true-false questions allow students to choose a correct answer from among a limited choice of responses. These traditional kinds of assessment are used extensively in large-scale testing programs and enjoy a long history of psychometric theory and test-development practice. According to Brian M. Stecher et al. in *Using Alternative Assessments in Vocational Education* (1977), portfolios provide an alternative form of assessment that gives students the opportunity to choose or to construct



their own responses from a much wider universe of possibilities (Stecher et al., 31). Portfolios and other alternative forms of assessment also provide evidence of a student's critical-thinking and self-management skills that are sometimes difficult to measure using traditional forms of assessment. On the other hand, portfolios are designed to demonstrate a broader range of student work and to contain a variety of components (e.g., student reflection, peer evaluations, and oral presentations).

A portfolio is a collection of work that demonstrates a student's knowledge, skills, and understanding. There is no standardized format. Portfolios may contain a variety of components, such as the following:

- writing samples or reports
- official records (e.g., transcripts, certificates, or grades)
- personal student reflections (e.g., a letter of introduction, a student log, or a journal)

Portfolios may also contain career-development materials including the following:

- resumes
- completed job applications
- letters of recommendation from teachers and employers
- samples of work products

Whether intended for career development or focused on specific projects, portfolios can be designed to present a student's best work or to show how a student's work has evolved over time. Portfolios can also be a comprehensive compilation of a student's work in a given area, for example, a career-development portfolio that spans a student's high school years.

### Purpose

The National Center for Research in Vocational Education (NCRVE), in *Getting to Work: A Guide for Better Schools*, suggests that portfolios can be used for a variety of purposes in the classroom:

- To document career development and exploration over time: Students have the opportunity to reflect on their progress in setting goals and making choices.
- To demonstrate the attainment of skills: A student's portfolio can be submitted to a potential employer or to a school if the student is applying for further education and training.



- To improve curriculum: The use of a portfolio can provide a structure and an organizing tool for projects that are sequenced over time. Portfolios give teachers an alternative strategy for evaluating a broader range of student skills and abilities. Through portfolios, teachers can observe student performance over time.

### Structure

Portfolios can be structured around a wide range of components that demonstrate student work, reflection, and teacher and peer evaluation. A teacher's decision about the components to be included in students' portfolios should be based on the following questions:

- Which standards does the teacher want to assess through the portfolios?
- For whom will the portfolio be useful?

Mikala Rahn and Gary Hoachlander, in module 4 of *Getting to Work: A Guide for Better Schools* (1995), suggest the following guidelines for selecting portfolio components:

- The components should be connected to the overall purpose of the portfolio.
- Standards and scoring guidelines should be defined for each component and each component should be scored or graded separately.
- Evaluating the overall portfolio is optional. Teachers may decide to grade the portfolio at the end of the year or invite a panel of teachers or employers as outside evaluators.
- Portfolios should be exhibited or housed in a single file or location so that the portfolio can be readily accessible and understood by someone outside the process.
- Students must be aware of the purpose of the overall portfolio and understand the instructions and expectations for each component.

Teachers should select required and optional components of the portfolio according to the guidelines described above.

Components of both project-specific and career-development portfolios can be categorized as follows: academic skills and knowledge, personal development, career development, and exhibits of student work. Table 3.1 shows a small sample of components that fall into each category.

**Table 3.1**

### EXAMPLES OF PORTFOLIO COMPONENTS

#### Academic Skills and Knowledge

- Research project
- Samples of written work
- Transcripts
- Test scores

#### Career Development

- Resumé
- Cover letter
- Job application
- References

#### Personal Development

- Journals
- Logs
- Self-reflection
- Peer reflection

#### Exhibits of Work

- Artwork
- Oral presentation
- Video
- Display or exhibit

## Assessment of Components

The NCRVE recommends that each component be evaluated using a three-step process. If the teacher chooses to evaluate the entire portfolio, a similar three-step process should be used.

- Determine the primary learner outcomes for the component chosen.
- Determine the method of review (e.g., teacher, peer, employer, panel of reviewers).
- Determine the scale for assessing student performance (e.g., a point system, grades A through F, or a weighted scale).

## Guiding Questions for Educators in the Use of Portfolios

The following questions were adapted from the Southern Regional Education Board Site Development Guide #10, *Advancing Students' Academic and Technical Achievement by Improving Classroom Assessment*. (See page 160 in the guide.)

- What is the reason for using a portfolio in my classroom? What skills and knowledge do I want students to be able to demonstrate?
- How much time will students be given to develop their portfolios (e.g., a semester, a school year, more than one school year)?
- Will the overall grade for the portfolio be used in more than one course? Are portfolio components assigned from different courses (e.g., English and social studies)?
- What components will be required? Will there be optional components?
- Who will select the work samples to be included in the portfolio?
- What are the consequences of failing to complete the portfolio?
- Will the portfolio document existing work completed for a course or will it include new activities developed specifically for the portfolio?
- Who will evaluate each component? Will students have another chance to complete or pass each component if they do not complete or pass it the first time?
- In what ways will the portfolio be used?